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A Trotline for Blue Crabs

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ABSTRACT

A method of using many kinds of bait on a trotline is presented. The gear is easy to make and use.

Traps are the principal method of catching blue crabs throughout southeastern United States. Some fishermen use the old method of trotlining, which has a very tough bait--bullnose, tripe, skate, stingray, and shark. This bait is secured by the loop of a slipknot in the mainline or on droplines (short lines) attached to the mainline. In another method, which is described in this paper, soft and small pieces of bait such as poultry or meat scraps and trash fish are as effective as tougher baits in catching blue crabs.

GEAR

Before describing the gear, I wish to emphasize that the sizes of rope, netting, anchors, and buoys can be altered to suit the individual fisherman. The equipment described here has proved to be successful in the blue crab fishery on the St. Johns River in northeast Florida.

Materials needed to construct a blue crab trotline about 1,000 feet long are:

1. 1,200 feet of 3/16-inch diameter nylon rope.
2. Two anchors--style and weight depend on type of bottom and speed of current. Scrap iron, cinder blocks, and rocks may be used.
3. Two buoys. Many items can be used, such as plastic jugs, clusters of net floats, and discarded life preservers.
4. 175 pieces of 10-inch square, 2-inch stretched mesh, No. 15 thread netting (preferably nylon).

NOTE: Discarded trawl, seine, or trap netting may be used, because the netting has little strain put on it.

The following instructions on how to assemble this gear are presented step by step to assist the beginner as well as the experienced fisherman:

Step 1. Rig the buoys and anchors to the mainline, in accordance with the plan shown on figure 1.

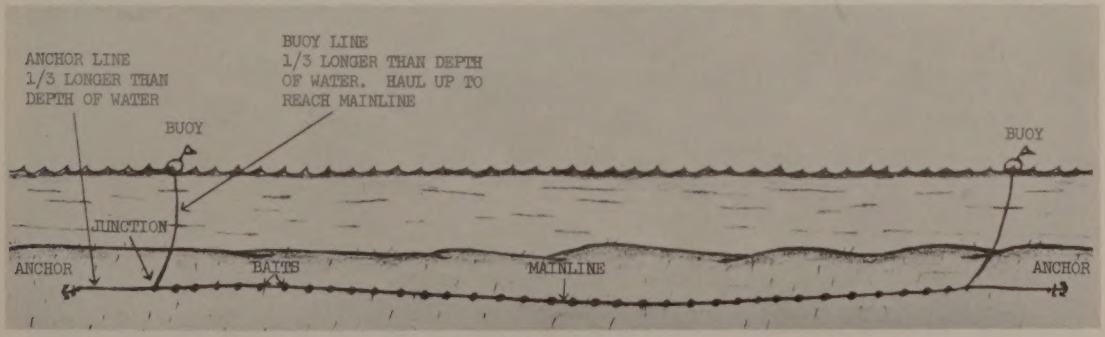

Figure 1.--Trotline.

Step 2. Tie a slipknot in the mainline 6 feet from the junction of the buoy line and the mainline (fig. 2).

Step 3. Place about one-half to three-fourths of a pound of bait on the center of the 10-inch square piece of netting (fig. 3).

Step 4. Gather the outer edges of the netting and twist to form a sack around the bait (fig. 4).

Step 5. Insert the twisted netting through the slipknot and pull the knot tight (fig. 5).

Secure a bait, as described, at 6-foot intervals along the entire mainline.

Coil baited line in a container of appropriate size or in a compartment in the stern of the boat. This act completes the rigging and baiting of the trotline.

FISHING TIPS

The trotline may be fished in most depths and on various types of bottom where blue crabs are found. The gear can be used from almost any small craft, such as a skiff powered with inboard or outboard motor or oars. If oars are used, ring-type or pinned oarlocks are best because they enable the fisherman to release an oar without fear of losing it while he dips the crabs as they surface.

In an area with a noticeable current, the trotline is set parallel to the current. One should avoid setting the trotline cross-current, because during the running of the trotline (removing crabs that are feeding on the bait) the current may cause the boat to drag the upstream anchor.

In areas with currents, two methods may be used to run the trotline. In the first, the boat is allowed to drift while the line slides through one hand of the fisherman while his other hand is free to dip net crabs. In the other, the boat is propelled against the current thereby increasing the maneuverability of the boat.

Some fishermen use devices to increase trotline efficiency. One man may fish the gear by passing the line over a roller or similar device extended over the side of the boat. He then uses one hand to operate the boat and the other to dip net crabs. Some fishermen suspend a basket about 3 feet in diameter and 2 feet deep below the roller to catch crabs as they drop off. The basket is emptied at the end of each run.

The length of time the line sets between runs depends on the number of crabs in the area. In areas with large concentrations of crabs, the line should be run continually; that is, as soon as a run is completed, go back to the opposite end and repeat the operation.

If the catch is kept wet and shaded, the result will be a quality product.

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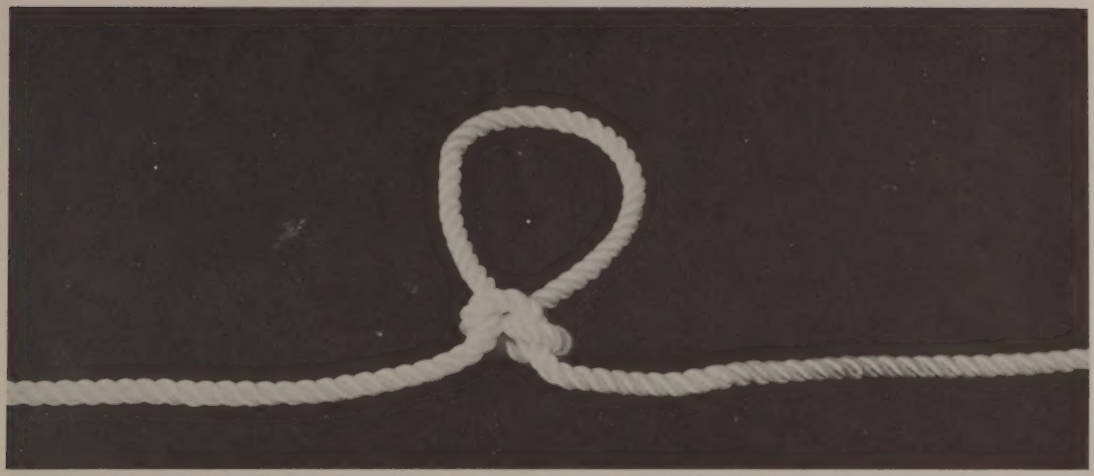

Figure 2.--Slipknot tied in the mainline.

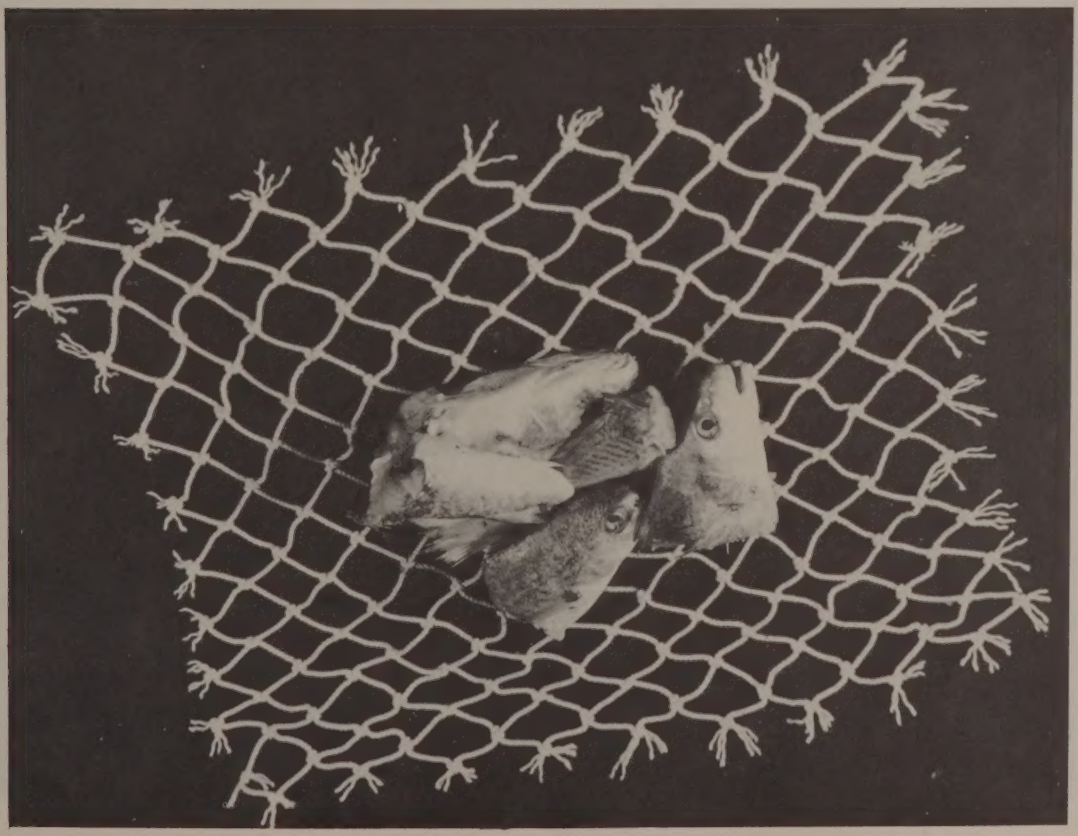

Figure 3.--Bait placed on netting.

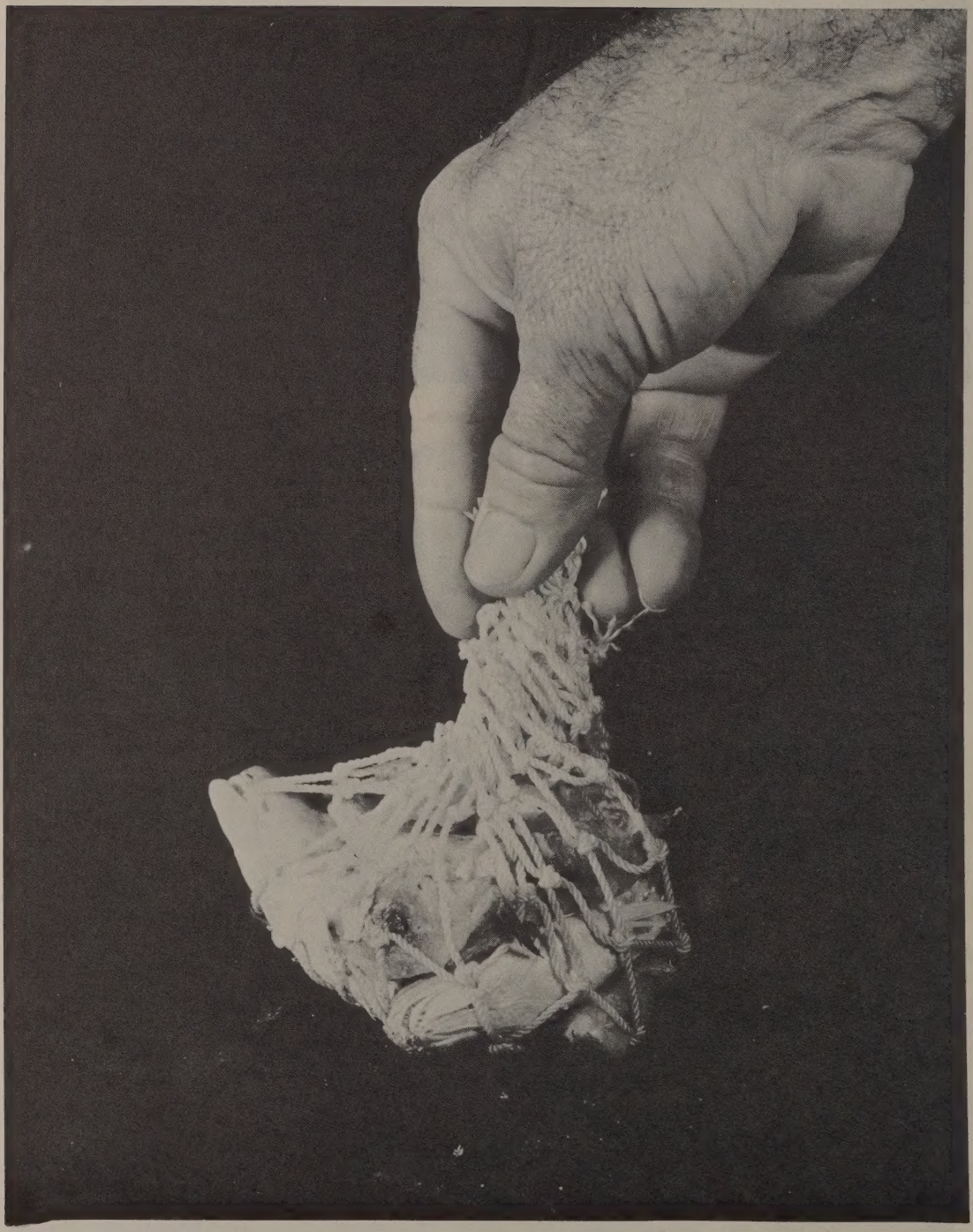

Figure 4.--Bait encompassed in sack of netting.

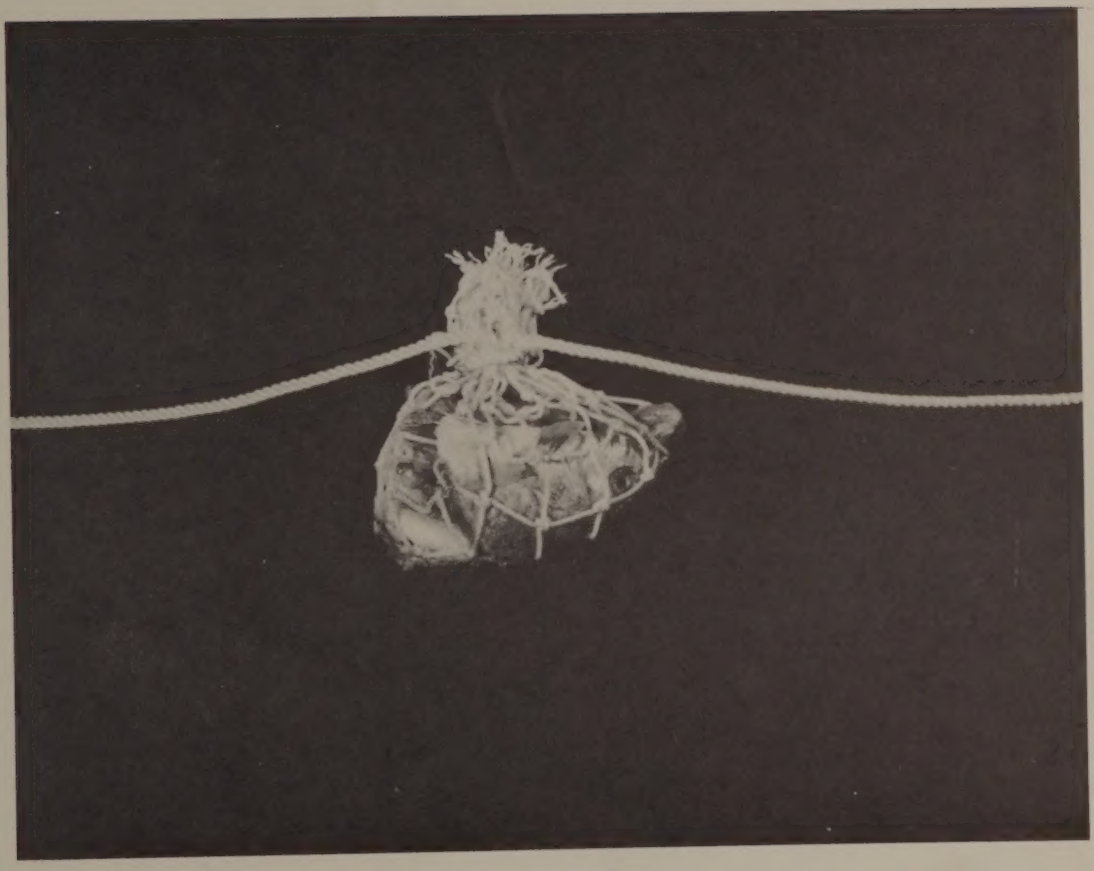

Figure 5.--Bait sack secured to mainline.

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